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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CA](#)
SUBJECT: LIBERAL WARINESS OF A SPRING ELECTION

REF: A. OTTAWA 216
[1](#)B. OTTAWA 211

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) According to Liberal Party National Campaign Co-chair Senator David P. Smith, spring 2008 likely is not the ideal time to face elections, at least from the Liberal perspective. In a meeting with PolMinCouns on February 12, he noted a general lack of public interest in an election so far, and said that even the Liberal Party rank-and-file workers were not "chomping at the bit" to bring down the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper -- just yet. He said that the public was still "getting to know" PM Harper, and claimed that the longer and better the voters knew him, the less likely they would be to support the Conservative Party. He admitted, however, that Liberal leader Stephane Dion had public perception problems of his own. (Note: Smith had supported Deputy Leader Michael Ignatieff in the divisive December 2006 leadership race. End note) He said that the Liberal Party would nonetheless be ready if necessary to "get the election over with," but commented that there was no looming large issue that would necessarily force the Liberals to vote against the government. He predicted eventual compromise on the Afghan mission vote (septel), while noting that the Liberals still needed to see the government's budget proposal before taking a stance on those votes. He emphasized that the budget was not usually the sort of issue to provoke an election, nor something the voters followed in great detail, although the broader question of an economic slowdown might be. In that case, he added, the Liberals were better off to wait until the economic situation possibly deteriorated further.

[1](#)2. (C) Smith acknowledged that, should an election take place any time soon, neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals could expect to form a majority government. However, he insisted that the Liberals could possibly end up forming a minority government instead of the Conservatives, although he indicated that this was not the more likely outcome.

[1](#)3. (C) Smith added that Canadian voters were fascinated with and well informed about the ongoing U.S. Presidential campaign, which made Canadian politics at this time seem rather less interesting in contrast.

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